

III. JUDICIAL BRANCH VISION



We must keep our focus as we navigate the challenges of operating a court system that serves a growing population of more than six million people. Case loads are exploding, while court funding is diminishing. We are proud of the technological advances we have made, and we have bold plans to implement new technologies to make the courts even more efficient. Using technology to improve access to court documents and to allow more electronic filing will continue to make the courts more transparent, accessible, and effective.

From... Justice 20/20: A Vision for the Future of the Arizona Judicial Branch 2010-2015

The Honorable Rebecca White Berch assumed the leadership of the Judiciary in June 2009, becoming Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court. She has provided direction to the Arizona Courts with her statement of Judicial Branch strategic initiatives in *Justice 20/20: A Vision for the Future of the Arizona Judicial Branch 2010-2015*, released in March 2010. The vision encompasses five broad goals, each associated with several key strategic business needs. This agenda is a road map to increasing the public's trust in and access to the court system.

STRENGTHENING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

The Arizona Judiciary is committed to improving the administration of justice. Every person has the right to a prompt, fair, and impartial hearing. The pursuit of justice thus requires that cases be heard in a timely manner and processed efficiently. To accomplish this goal, the courts require effective case processing and efficient management of information and resources. In this era of dwindling resources, the Arizona judicial system must review and modernize operations and policies to ensure that public resources are used effectively, efficiently, and accountably.

MAINTAINING A PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE AND IMPROVING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

Maintaining a professional workforce and improving operational efficiencies are essential to achieving excellence. Judicial Branch leadership must continuously examine and improve not only the systems, processes, and procedures used to deliver justice to Arizonans, but also the competency and professionalism of those who do the courts' work. The courts value and encourage diversity and treat all people with courtesy, respect, fairness, and dignity.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS

Public confidence in the judicial system is fostered by understanding the work of the courts. In recent years, the Arizona Judiciary has increased its efforts to educate the public through seminars, outreach programs, and publications. As the public comes to rely on technology to conduct business and obtain information, the Judicial Branch must continue to adapt how it interacts and communicates with the public.

Although the method of delivery is important, the content of communications is more so. Court communications must convey timely, relevant, and meaningful information to court system employees and volunteers, members of the public attempting to access the courts, justice system partners working in collaboration with the courts, and funding entities allocating scarce resources. In every circumstance, success depends upon timely communication of clear, concise information.

PROTECTING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

The removal of an abused or neglected child from the parents' home and the termination of parental rights involve significant government intrusions into the family and represent a significant use of the court's authority. For such cases, all parties must be assured prompt access to courts and due process. The judicial system must consider the rights of the parents and the safety and wellbeing of the child or children.

On the other end of the age spectrum, the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that nearly one quarter of Arizona's population is at least 55 years of age. The ramifications of an aging population on the Judicial Branch include increased filings in the areas of guardianship, conservatorship, elder fraud, and physical abuse.

Although significant strides have been made to ensure that fiduciaries are held accountable for the services they provide to their vulnerable clients, much remains to be done to protect our seniors and other vulnerable persons. The recent report of the Committee on Improving Judicial Oversight and Processing of Probate Court Matters contains two recommendations that depend upon technology to better enable the judiciary to protect Arizona's vulnerable and incapacitated persons.

Holding those convicted of crimes accountable and reducing their likelihood of re-offending is central to protecting Arizona's communities. Evidence-based sentencing relies on a set of tools designed to offer judicial officials objective, scientific research about criminal behavior to assist them when making probation decisions. Coordinating

objective data with the risk level of each probationer allows the judicial officer to tailor a term of probation and supervision that will achieve greater levels of success in rehabilitation and preventing recidivism. In the criminal process, we must also help ensure that victims are afforded the full panoply of rights available to them.

IMPROVING THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The Arizona Supreme Court regulates the practice of law, ensuring that Arizona attorneys meet the highest standards of professionalism and comply with rules designed to protect the public.

During the past decade, the Arizona Supreme Court and the State Bar of Arizona have worked to improve the attorney discipline system. The Court wishes to maintain a fair and impartial discipline system, while decreasing the time and cost to process discipline cases, especially those that proceed to formal charges. Although progress has been made, more can be done to reduce processing times without compromising fairness.

The Court's authority to regulate the practice of law also includes establishing qualifications for admission to practice law in Arizona. New and amended rules of the Supreme Court have modernized Arizona's admission process by allowing "admission on motion" for lawyers who meet Arizona character and fitness standards and are licensed in other states that have substantially similar admission requirements.

Additionally, the Court, through its Committee on Examinations, is identifying opportunities to participate in a uniform bar examination (UBE). UBE scores will be portable to other states that give the UBE. The Court is also studying ways to streamline the character and fitness application and reference check procedure for Arizona State Bar applicants. In addition, the Court is working toward the goal of putting online the entire application process for admission to the Arizona State Bar.